

A LETTER

TO THE RIGHT REV.

THE LORD BISHOP OF QUEBEC,

ON

Subjects connected with Tractarianism

IN THE CHURCH.

BY

THE REV. GILBERT PERCY, LL. D., T. C. D.

Cathedral Lecturer, and Secretary of the Diocesan Church Society.

QUEBEC :

PRINTED BY P. LAMOUREUX, SHAW'S BUILDINGS,
FOOT OF MOUNTAIN HILL, LOWER TOWN.

**"From all false doctrine, heresy, and schism;
from hardness of heart and contempt of thy Word
and Commandment, good Lord deliver us."—**

LITANY.

TO THE RIGHT REV.
THE LORD BISHOP OF QUEBEC.

My Lord,

When I reflect upon occurrences of no remote date in England, when I recall the teachings of Archdeacon Denison, the mummeries enacted at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, and at St. Barnabas', the atrocities, (I can call them by no lighter name) perpetrated in the Scobell case, and other matters of a cognate character, too numerous and too notorious to demand any thing more than a mere passing reference, I consider no apology to be necessary on my part, as an attached member and humble Minister of the Church of England, for taking the liberty of addressing this letter to your Lordship, whose especial duty it is to watch over not merely the temporal concerns, but infinitely more so over the spiritual interests of the Church in this diocese: and, consequently, to employ your best and holiest energies in the endeavour to "banish and "drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God's word."

I believe, my Lord, that Tractarian tendencies are stealthily, but steadily, developing themselves in our midst. And if we of the Clergy, who are set as watchmen unto the house of Israel, will not lift up a standard, if we suffer our trumpets to send forth an uncertain sound, if we give no warning when the enemy approaches, and is even at our gates, great will be our guilt: and of our Zion it may be said, "Her watchmen are blind; "they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they "cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber."

I do not mean, my Lord, to insinuate, (when I bring an accusation, it is not my wont to hint it: but to state it honestly and boldly), I do not mean, in any wise, to

insinuate that there is aught of unsoundness in the clergy, as a body :—God forbid that I should do so ! for that were contrary to my firm persuasion and belief. Nor do I mean to imply that their flocks are in any degree infected with the virus of Tractarianism. On the contrary, I believe most firmly, and beg leave most sincerely to congratulate your Lordship on the fact, (for such I am convinced it is) that the Laity are thoroughly sound, and to a man opposed either to the introduction of Oxford novelties, or to the revival of exploded superstitions. And, if it were necessary to call upon them for an expression of their sentiments, I entertain the full conviction that I should be justified in confidently assuring your Lordship, that they would be ready to come forward, as true Churchmen, and practically mark their appreciation of the "cunning craftiness" of those, who are endeavouring, so far as their puny efforts may, to insinuate between the goodly hewn stones of our Protestant Church the narrow extremity of the Tractarian wedge. An attempt, (blessed be He that reigneth over Zion !), that must prove bootless, and profitless, and vain, so long as churchmen acknowledge the Bible, the Bible only, as the charter of their Church ! In abler hands indeed, far abler than those that at present attempt to wield the implement, the effort would prove a failure, complete and total. I have therefore no apprehension whatever from its application, under the direction of the class of individuals, who for some time have ventured to assume its management. But, though we may not fear for the stability of the edifice, it is our duty, your Lordship's duty and ours, the duty both of the Laity and of the Clergy, to look well that it be neither dishonoured, nor disfigured, that its fair proportions be not marred, nor its goodly stone-work overlaid with any worthless "daubing of untempered mortar."

Occupying, by your Lordship's appointment, the position which I have the honour to hold among the Clergy of Quebec, and filling the important situation of Secretary to the Church Society of the Diocese, I feel it a duty doubly incumbent upon me to oppose, so far as my poor efforts may, practices and principles, which I believe to be not only contrary to the doctrines of the

Church of England, but to be subversive of them, and to be based on deadly error. I am aware, my Lord, that in the faithful discharge of such a duty, I cannot hope to escape the shafts that "back-wounding calumny" may aim, that I must anticipate the possible incurring of no small amount of obloquy, that I must expect to have the purity of my motives impugned, that I must submit to be looked upon by some as a troubler of Israel. But, I have counted the cost: and, in the cause of truth; in the cause of the Church of England, which I believe to be the cause of Christ; God being my helper, I value not what man can do unto me.

But I have a good hope, however, that the general verdict of the Church in this Diocese will not be unfavourable to me; and that *they* will rather be stamped as the troublers of Israel, who, through a silly fondness for the puerile absurdities of past ages, an insane desire for the revival of practices long obsolete, a childish passion for the introduction of frivolous novelties, and the inculcation of exaggerated views of things in themselves indifferent, have excited divisions, given origin to doubts, and stirred up strife among the congregation of the Lord. I am confident, indeed, that persons of the class described will be looked upon as disturbers of the Church's peace, rather than they, who take their stand upon her Articles and Liturgy; and fearlessly, because conscientiously, oppose the insidious artifices of those, who in the pride of that "little learning," whereof "shallow draughts intoxicate the brain," or through simple, senseless folly, would graft, in this young Land, upon the goodly stem of the Church the foul, unwholesome branches of the Tractarian Upas-tree.

I am thus, my Lord, in a measure forced by my position; compelled by a sense of duty; constrained by the anti-Church-of-England principles and practices of some, from whom one might have expected better things; to come forward before the public, in a manner foreign from my habits, and altogether uncongenial to my disposition.

But, in addition to these motives, in themselves sufficient, I have yet another, of closer personal interest to myself; the importance of which your Lordship will readily acknowledge. Having, not long ago, on the

platform of a public meeting, expressed my belief that Tractarian principles were being disseminated by certain individuals in this Diocese; and your Lordship having shortly after, at a committee of the Church Society, pointedly expressed your dissent from the opinions, which I had given expression to on the occasion in question, and declared your firm conviction that there existed no foundation for them; I feel that your Lordship has left me no alternative, but either to retract my statements, as publicly as they were made, acknowledging candidly that I had been mistaken; a course which none would adopt more cheerfully and more honestly than I, should my views be indeed demonstrated as erroneous: or to endeavour to establish the allegations offered, to substantiate the charges made, and thus to evince that I have spoken neither falsely, nor "unadvisedly with my lips."

On the present occasion, (reserving to myself the right of entering, in all probability, more largely upon the subject hereafter), I shall confine myself to a review of a single Tract, which has been put into circulation by some of your Lordship's Clergy. And, if I succeed in proving—as I fully expect, with God's help, to do—that many of the doctrines therein inculcated are plainly repugnant to those taught by the Church of England, and are in perfect harmony with the Tractarian heresies of the present day, such is my confidence in your Lordship's sense of justice, and so strong my belief in your lack of sympathy with the views of modern innovators, that I am convinced you will at once pronounce me guiltless of misrepresentation; and, however grieved at the necessity which called for such exposure, you will rejoice that such unwholesome and erroneous doctrines have been dragged from their darkness into the light of day, that they may be known, and condemned, and shunned by the true children of the Church.

There is then, my Lord, a Tract, published by the "Society for promoting Christian Knowledge," at present circulating in your Lordship's Diocese, and in your Lordship's parish, to which I beg respectfully to direct your special attention. It consists of extracts from the works of Nelson, an old writer, who lived during the reigns of Charles II., James II. and William III. To

James II. of persecuting and popish memory, he was devotedly attached: and, on the accession of William, he remained a *non-juror*, refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the Protestant King; and so continued to remain, until a few years previous to his death. The Tract professes to be merely a disquisition on "The Ember-days of the Four Seasons;" but its main objects most unquestionably are, or, at least, its direct tendency most indubitably is, to exalt unduly the importance of external ordinances, and to magnify, beyond all reasonable bounds, the dignity of the clerical Order.

The writer's inordinate zeal for the attainment of these ends may in part be accounted for; and, in a good man, to a certain extent excused; when we consider the peculiar circumstances of the Church of England in his day. "Living at a time," (as stated in Life of the Author, prefixed to the edition of the original work, pub. 1848.) "when sound doctrine and pure morality were alike banished from the high places of the earth, and when the holiest ordinances of our religion were neglected or impugned;" living in an age, as he himself remarks in his preface, "which among those crying abominations, that like a torrent had overspread the nation, seemed to distinguish itself by a great temptation for the Clergy :" it is scarcely to be wondered at that, as the over-strained steel will rebound in the direction diametrically opposite to that of the force originally applied, he should have been led, through disgust at the tone of reckless immorality so generally prevalent throughout the land, and the spirit of neglectful apathy exhibited towards even the most solemn of the outward rites and ceremonies of the Church, to rush into the opposite extreme; and to look upon those things as constituting the substance of religion, which are its adjuncts merely, or at most, only the means or vehicles of grace.

Actuated by such an influence as this—so at least, in charity, I would assume—actuated by such an influence it is, that, indignant at the contempt poured upon Festivals and Fasts by the Puritans, and at the general indifference manifested towards them by the members of the Church of England, he is seduced into an unholy effort to elevate them to the same level of sanc-

tity with the Seventh Day, to rank the institutions of man high as the ordinances of the Lord!—Here are his own words, as written in the preface: “It is highly probable, from all Sundays in the year being placed at the head of the festivals, that it was the intention of those that compiled the Liturgy that they should all be observed after the same manner, not only with prayers and thanksgivings, but *with rest from ordinary labour.*” A conclusion, directly the reverse of that at which, I confess, I should have arrived from the same premises. For, as the Sundays are placed “*at the head,*” not mingled nor amalgamated with the Festivals: and, in every Book of Common Prayer that I have ever seen, severed from them by a separating line; I should have concluded, that the compilers of our Liturgy looked upon them as essentially distinct, did not mean that they should be observed after the same manner, and gave the higher honour to the Sabbath Day.

But, my Lord, omitting any further reference to the preface, I beg permission to direct your attention to the Extracts themselves.

The first chapter is taken up with an account of the Ember-Days, speculations as to the etymology of the term, Doctor Maraschal’s conjectures upon the subject, the mode of manufacturing Ember-bread, and the proper time for eating it; together with a lengthy disquisition on the several offices of Deacon, Archdeacon, Priest, Presbyter, Bishop, Archbishop, Primate, and Metropolitan:—topics which, however interesting, or even useful in their proper place, your Lordship will agree with me, are likely to prove any thing but “good to the use of edifying,” any thing but profitable to the soul’s health, or conducive to the spiritual sustenance, of the generality of the dwellers in St. John’s or St. Louis’ Suburbs.

With one further reference, I shall dismiss this chapter. In answer to the question, “What is the office of a Bishop?” it is stated, among other matters, that it is his office “to absolve penitents.” Now, my Lord, as this Tract is exposed for sale at the Depository of the Church Society, of which your Lordship is the President, and is circulated extensively in this parish, of which your Lord-

ship is the Rector, it is to be presumed that such sale, and such circulation, meet with your sanction and approval. I feel myself therefore fully justified, for the honour of that Church, Reformed and Protestant, to which we belong, whose pure and un-popish doctrines are built upon the unerring Word alone; but infinitely more so, for the sake of the poor and ignorant, who may read that Tract; for the sake of the immortal souls, whom God only can absolve from sin—I feel myself, for these and other reasons, fully justified in calling upon your Lordship to explain distinctly, to define explicitly, what meaning they are to attach to these words, in what sense they are to understand the declaration, that it is one of your Lordship's episcopal and priestly functions "to absolve penitents."

The second chapter is chiefly occupied with the subject of Ordination. The questions are largely discussed, as to whether "the office of the Apostles was superior to that of the Seventy;" and as to "what powers were exercised by the Apostles, which the Seventy were not endowed with." Various testimonies are cited in evidence of the early establishment of episcopal government. In the course of one brief page we find the following formidable catalogue of Worthies of the ancient days:—St. Clement, St. Ignatius, Clemens Alexandrinus, Ireneus, Tertullian, Origen, St. Cyprian, and Eusebius. An array of authorities, whose very names, one would suppose, ought to be sufficient to carry conviction to the hearts of all the inhabitants of the Suburbs. But, lest names alone might prove inadequate to evince to them, (what possibly they never questioned), that the power of Ordination belongs solely to the Bishop, they are overwhelmed by the very words of Jerome, the *ipsissima* Latin words themselves! "Quid enim facit, exceptā ordinatione, episcopus, quod presbyter non faciat!"

What a profitable Tract for the perusal of the poor and ignorant, for the enlightening of the ungodly and the sinner!

Towards the conclusion of this chapter we find the question propounded, "What privilege, besides Ordination, is peculiar to the character of a Bishop?"—The reply to which is, in part, "The solemn rite of

" Confirmation ; wherein the Bishop, by laying on of hands, and *authoritative* prayer, *conveys* to such persons, who in the presence of the congregation sincerely renew their baptismal vow, a proportionable degree of God's Grace and Holy Spirit." I mean not to decry the rite of Confirmation. I desire not to cast the slightest slur upon its usefulness. It is a holy, an ancient, and, to those that are recipients of it in a fitting spirit, a beneficial rite. But, I had supposed, and so, I presume, had most Church-of-England men supposed, that the goodness of God would unfailingly, for Christ's sake, bestow his Grace and Holy Spirit upon all, (however in themselves confessedly unworthy of such vast blessings), who should sincerely renew their baptismal vow, even though they had never been participants of that Rite : upon all, who should from the heart " renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh :" upon all, who should from the heart " believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith :" upon all who, in reliance on His aid, should faithfully resolve to " keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life." But no!—These blessings are to be attained, not through repentance, not through faith, not through the individual sinner's heart-wrung supplications, not even from the overflowings of God's spontaneous goodness : but—by the *Bishop's hands*, and through his "*authoritative* prayer." These are the mystic vehicles of the Holy Ghost : the magic conveyancers of the Grace of God!

The writer proceeds to say, " in the primitive times these effects," (i. e. God's Grace, and Holy Spirit), " were extraordinary gifts, as best fitted to the infant state of the church ; but, upon the settlement of it, the Holy Spirit guides it by secret and invisible communications ; and these common graces are obtained by such as are *qualified*," (the Romish *grace de congruo*, I presume) " to receive them, and seek them in a regular and *ministerial way*"—that is, of course, by the laying on of hands, and by the *authoritative* prayer.

After these statements, I confess that I was surprised to find the writer quoting the lx. canon, in the most self-complacent manner possible, as though it favoured

the views which he propounds, instead of being directly opposed to them. In good sooth, my Lord, here or nowhere have we

“the engineer
Hoist by his own petard!”

Quoting the canon, he observes that the Church of England has thus declared her sense of this matter: “It hath been a solemn, ancient, and laudable custom, “continued from the Apostles’ time, that all bishops “should lay their hands upon children baptized and ins-“tructed in the catechism of the Christian religion, “praying over them and blessing them”—(Can. ix.)—Yes, that is precisely the Church of England’s doctrine: but manifestly not the doctrine of the old Non-juror; although, by what appears to border on a “pious fraud,” he would fain press this canon into his service, and have us believe that it speaks the language of his superstition. The bishop, according to the accredited authorities of the Church of England, lays his hands upon those who come forward to be confirmed, praying over them, and blessing them. But neither Canon, nor Confirmation-Service, breathes one syllable of the *authoritative* prayer which *conveys* God’s Grace and Holy Spirit.

We turn over a page or two, in which Tertullian, St. Cyprian, and Jerome, are again paraded, and we find, in an enumeration of the qualifications necessary for Confirmation, the following indispensable one: “They must “prepare themselves for this ordinance by prayer and “*fasting*, &c. ***** And, in order to these ends, it is “advisable that the candidate should frequently read “over the Offices of Baptism and Confirmation.” I have just read them both over, on the supposition of a possible failure of my memory; but in neither of these Offices is the word, “*fasting*,” so much as once mentioned, nor is there even a remote allusion to the subject.

The concluding query in the chapter now under review, has reference to the advantages of Confirmation. Among the advantages specified is the following one: “It conveys divine grace to encounter our spiritual “enemies, and to enable us to perform what we under-“take.” Indeed! Confirmation *conveys* divine grace! *enables* us to encounter our spiritual enemies, and to perform what we undertake!—If this be indeed the case,

then is the Romish doctrine of the *opus operatum* true, and it is the doctrine of the Church of England!—which I deny.

Chapter III dilates largely on “the dignity of the Priesthood.”—There is no one, my Lord, less disposed than I, to detract from the true dignity of the Clergy.—It is impossible, or, at least, it were absurd, to suspect me of any motive for desiring the depreciation of mine own Order. Heartily do I subscribe to the declaration of the author of this Tract, that the office of a Christian Minister is “an employment in its own nature the most “honourable, and in its effects the most beneficial to “mankind.” But, when he demands, “what are the benefits of the Priesthood?” and replies that, (among other things), “it is by the execution of the Priest’s “Office, that our spiritual *life is maintained by the Holy Eucharist,*” I demur to this, and I denounce it as a Romish figment, and a most unscriptural falsehood.

The Catechism of the Church of England asserts that the benefits, whereof we are partakers through the Eucharist, are, not the *maintaining* of the *life* of our souls, but the “strengthening and refreshing,” only, of our souls. And an authority, higher than that of the Catechism, has enunciated the glorious and eternal truth, that it is “Christ who is our life.” “I am crucified with Christ;” (saith the great Apostle of the Gentiles), nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live”—not by sacramental grace, not by eucharistic ordinances!—but, “*by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*”

Again, it is asserted that by the execution of the Priest’s office, “the pardon of our sins is signed and sealed to us.” What the meaning of this may be, I do not pretend to understand: and, in the hope of an explanation being offered, “pause for a reply.”

Again, it is asserted that “our minds and consciences “are quieted by the comfort and benefit of absolution.” The allusion here is, I presume, to the form of absolution in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick, and to the first Exhortation in the Communion Service: but, if so, the writer has strangely pretermitted all notice of the accompanying “ghostly counsel and advice,” which are

described as equally ministering to "the quieting of the conscience, and the avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

I confess, my Lord, that I had once felt much difficulty on the subject of the form of absolution referred to. The apparent strength of the language employed perplexed, and, (I may acknowledge it), almost confounded me. But, the more searchingly I investigated the question, the more closely I compared the form with other portions of the same Office; I am rejoiced to be enabled to say, so much the more firmly did I become convinced, that they who framed that Form, meant it to be viewed in a precatory and declaratory light only, not in a judicial. The words of absolution, let us observe, are introduced by an acknowledgment, that they only have any claim to pardon and forgiveness, "*who truly repent, and believe*" in the Lord Jesus: and earnest prayer is offered to Him, that "*of his great mercy He may forgive the offences*" of the penitent. And immediately after the utterance of the form, the direction of the Rubric is, "Then the Priest shall say the Collect following." Now, the Collect following contains this petition, "*Open thine eye of mercy upon this thy servant, who most earnestly desireth pardon and forgiveness.*" But why should this fervent prayer for mercy be, at that instant, offered in the penitent's behalf; if, in that very moment, he had already obtained mercy, through the priestly absolution? Or why should the absolved penitent still "*most earnestly desire pardon and forgiveness,*" if the priestly lips had already conferred upon him both? Again, in the same Collect there is the following petition: "*Forasmuch as he, (the penitent) putteth his full trust only in thy mercy, impute not unto him his former sins.*" Now, on the supposition of the penitent having just received judicial absolution from the priest, could any thing, (I appeal to the common sense of men), could any thing be imagined more outrageously contradictory, more incongruously absurd, than that the absolving priest, having by God's authority pronounced the pardon of the penitent's "*former sins,*" should in the same breath thus earnestly supplicate the Lord that those self-same former sins may not be imputed to him? Is there not indeed throughout

this whole Collect, to be used immediately after the form of absolution, a complete and full acknowledgment, on the part both of the penitent and of the priest, that God only can pronounce the absolute pardon of sin : and that the priestly absolution, even in the Office for the Sick, is nothing more than that which is delivered continually from our Desks, in the order for Morning and Evening Prayer throughout the year ; wherein it is proclaimed, that " Almighty God hath given power and " commandment to his Ministers, to *declare* and *pro-*
"nounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution
 " and Remission of their sins ?"

That the Church of England attaches no very weighty measure of importance to the form of Absolution embodied in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick, is, I conceive, sufficiently evident from several considerations. She can scarcely, indeed, be said to do more than merely to suggest its use, and that only on particular occasions. She certainly does not anywhere enjoin it. The Rubric simply says, that if the sick person " feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter," he shall be moved to make confession of his sins, (to which, who is there that will object ?), and then the form of Absolution may be used, or shall be used; but only, (it is expressly provided), if the person " humbly and heartily desire it " As a further evidence that the Church attaches no undue weight to the form of Absolution, I may state, on the authority of Procter, (Hist. Prayer Book, Note, P. 389), a witness certainly not prejudiced in favour of the views I advocate, that while the Rubric of 1549 required this Absolution to be used in *all* instances of confession, this direction was omitted in 1552, and the phrase shall absolve "*after this sort*" substituted for the original "*after this form.*" An omission, and a substitution, manifestly not made without design, not without significance; and, in my judgment, clearly establishing the fact, that not merely was the use of the Absolution left discretionary with the Minister, but even the words with which it should be clothed, the shape in which it should be delivered. He is to absolve, not after this *form*, but after this *sort*: that is, on this wise, after this fashion.

In explanation of the reason why it is directed in the

Rubric, that the Absolution in the Morning Service should be pronounced by the Priest, and not by a Deacon, I find the following argument in "Hill's Letter to the Laity," p. 19 : an argument which, I conceive, may with equal force be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, as furnishing us with reasons, sufficient to enable us to account satisfactorily for the strength of language admitted in the Absolution in the Order for the Visitation of the sick. "Perhaps," he says, "it may be asked, 'Why does the Church of England confine to *Priests* the power of pronouncing Absolution, if it be nothing more than a *declaration* of forgiveness, upon repentance?' I reply, Because, when our Liturgy was drawn up, the people had been accustomed to rate very highly the benefits of Absolution ; and our Reformers, anxious not to shock, unnecessarily, the prejudices of the people, nor altogether deprive them of their accustomed cordial, lest it should be said 'the old wine is better,' thought it advisable to invest the Declaration of Forgiveness with greater solemnity, by confining it to the higher order of Clergy, while they carefully guarded against the notion that any mortal could bestow remission of sins."

It will be seen at once, as I have suggested, how easily, and how effectually, this argument may be employed in order to account for the nature of the language admitted in the Service for the Sick.

But the words, "*Ego te absolve*," I absolve thee, were not known, were not used in the Church of God, before the 12th or 13th century ; as appears abundantly both from Hooker and from Bingham. And, in fact, in the 16th century so little belief was there in the priestly absolution, that Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, (Defence of his Answer to Cartwright) assumes the acknowledged fact of a bishop having no power to remit sins, as an illustration to evince that he neither has, nor pretends to have, power to convey in Ordination the graces of the Holy Spirit. I am aware, indeed, that in the words of the Archbishop, a Prelate to whom the Church of England owes, in a great measure, what she yet retains of the wreck of her originally vast possessions, and "the preservation of the Episcopal order :" (Vid. Fry, Ch. Hist. p. 509), and whose orthodoxy was

of a type so rigid, that he was an object of censure equally at the hands of Puritans and of Romanists—I am aware that in the Archbishop's words there will be found strong grounds for sore disgust to some of our young sciolists in theology: but, nevertheless, they must be quoted. "To use," saith he, "these words, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost,' in ordering of Ministers, which Christ himself used in appointing his Apostles, is no more ridiculous and blasphemous than it is to use the words that he used in the Supper :" and then, proceeding with his argument, he adds, "the Bishop, by speaking these words, doth not take upon him to give the *Holy Ghost*, no more than he does to *remit sins*, when he pronounceth the remission of sins."

Even stronger still is the language of Cranmer, Archbishop and Martyr: which, as connected with the subject of the last quotation, though not directly bearing upon the point that I am now discussing, I shall venture to bring forward, as exhibiting how widely the world-renowned worthies of a former time, men who sealed their profession with their blood, differed from the modern school of Romanizing Theologians. "There is no more promise of God," saith Cranmer, "that grace is given in the committing of the *ecclesiastical office*, than there is in the committing of the *civil office*.—(Burnet, Hist. Ref. Vol. 1. B. III. Rec. 21.)

Hear ye this, ye unfledged Divines; alumni of universities equally unfledged: who seem, in your self-sufficiency, to think that when ye die, "wisdom shall die with you!"

Two more quotations, from men whose names are in themselves a tower of strength, and I dismiss this portion of my subject.

Gilbert Burnet, sometime Bishop of Sarum, writing on the very topic of the Absolution in the Order for the Visitation for the Sick, thus expresses himself:—"The pardon that we give, in the name of God, is only *declaratory* of his pardon, or *supplicatory* in a prayer to Him for pardon :" and then he further adds, "In this we have the whole practice of the Church, 'till the Twelfth Century, universally on our side."—(Expos, Art. xxv.) Here we have, veritably, the famous Canon of Vincentius Lerinensis, "*Quod semper, quod ubique,*

quod ab omnibus;" &c.; the pet formula of the Schools of Oxford and of Rome: but—with this difference, it is wholly on our side—wholly on the side of Protestant, Evangelie Truth.

Lastly, Richard Hooker, surnamed "the judicious," in his great work, written in defence of the Church of England against the attacks of the Puritans, under the head of "Absolution of Penitents," thus writes: "the act of sin *God alone remitteth*.—***** The stain *He* " washeth out by the sanctifying grace of his Spirit; " and concerning the punishment of sin, as none else hath " power to cast body and soul into hell-fire, so none " hath power to deliver either, besides Him. As for the " ministerial sentence of private absolution, it can be no " more than a DECLARATION what *God hath done*: it " hath but the force of the Prophet Nathan's Absolution, " *God hath taken away thy sin*; than which construction, " especially of words judicial, there is not any thing " more common." And again the judicious Hooker writes: " Wherefore the further we wade, the better we " see it still appear, that THE PRIEST BOTH NEVER IN " ABSOLUTION (no not so much as by way of service and " ministry) REALLY, either FORGIVE the act, TAKES " AWAY the uncleanness, or REMOVE the punishment of " sin; but if the party-penitent come CONTRITE, *he hath* " ABSOLUTION BEFORE ABSOLUTION: if NOT CONTRITE, " then, although the Priest should ten thousand times " absolve him, ALL WERE IN VAIN."—(Eccles. Pol. B. VI. C. 6).

It is furthermore, my Lord, asserted in this chapter, that, by the execution of the Priest's Office, "men are turned from darkness to light, convinced of the folly of their sins, and the necessity of being holy," &c. No doubt, through the instrumentality of godly ministers, such great and glorious results are often witnessed: and blessed are they that thus "turn many to righteousness; they shall shine as the stars for ever and ever!" But the spirit of the writer's assertion in this passage evidently tends to the inculcation of the belief, that these results follow the effectual working of that one great instrumentality alone; to magnify which, in every imaginable manner, *per fas et nefas*, is manifestly the object high, for the accomplishment of which he has entered the

lists, and laid his lance in rest, prepared, as a gallant knight of chivalry, to hold the field, *a l'outrance*, against all comers. He will not admit even the most passing allusion to the possible fact, that sinners may, in some rare instances perhaps, be turned from darkness to light, be convinced of the folly, the danger, and the guilt of sin, and of the necessity of newness and of holiness of life, even through the poor influence of such a worthless thing as mere lay agency; or through the prayerful study of those gracious Oracles, which, if we give aught of credence to our Lord himself, are able to make men wise unto salvation. These things are not alluded to, these topics are not touched upon. Why should they: when the writer's object is the enhancement of the power and dignity of the Priesthood?

In further support of the object which he affects, the writer, (most ludicrously, in my judgment) quotes Plutarch, and Strabo, and Porphyry, and Cæsar, and Titus Livius; that we may learn how the Egyptian Kings, if chosen out of the profane ranks of the soldiery, were immediately obliged to become Priests: how the Magi in Persia, were "Privy-counsellors to the Emperors:" how the Brachmans in India were exempted from "legal penalties and tributes"—*benefit of clergy*, I venture to suggest!—how the Druids of Britain, France, and Germany, "judged all public and private causes, and distributed rewards and punishments;" how the Romans set so great a value upon the priestly order, that if their highest magistrates by chance met any of Vesta's Priests, they gave them place: how Numa Pompilius—But my patience fails. Here are this Church Champion's authorities, (and verily, strange ones they are: these antique pagans!) for the due upholding of the dignity of the Christian Ministry—some of his authorities, at least. And I wish his upholders and admirers ample joy of them!

In answer to the question, how the priesthood was esteemed among Christians in the olden time, we are informed that "Ecclesiastical history is full of instances of the respect they then paid to their bishops and presbyters, by kissing their hands, and bowing to beg their blessing." If I may venture to hazard the remark, I would reverently suggest that profane history also affords us instances numberless of similar prostrations—

prostrations both of mind and body : belted knights, and sceptred kings, bowing in all lowliness and self-abasement before the shaven priests of Rome ; right puissant sovereigns, like lackeys at the palfrey's side, humbly holding bit and stirrup for the gorgeous Hierarch to mount : throned monarchs suffering their royal diadems to be kicked and trodden by the sacerdotal foot ; and even Imperial forms, half-clad in rags, feet bare, exposed to all "the pitiless pelting of the storm," waiting for days together, unadmitted, at a proud Pontiff's gate. And to descend at once from the high sublime to the low ridiculous, Newspaper history, if we had access to the files of some five and twenty or thirty years ago, would tell us how that the earlier portion of the present century was not one whit behind the old ecclesiastic times, in the exhibition of the respect men paid to their Bishops : for is it not recorded on those files, how the world-known "Liberator" of Ireland knelt lowly in the mud of Ennis, humbly to claim the passing benediction of his Bishop ! But why go back for thirty years, to disinter examples of reverence for the priestly office ? Is it not, even in this our day, an honour highly esteemed, and that appertaineth but to few, to be allowed permission to bow down, and kiss with solemn awe the toe of him, who sits upon the seven hills, a priest, (if without profanation I may say it,) "a priest upon his throne!"

We are further, my Lord, informed in this chapter, that the Clergy of the Church of England are "God's Vice-gerents," (Will not old Rome feel disposed to consider this announcement as constituting rather a felonious appropriation of her rights !), "God's Vice-gerents and visible representatives here on earth ;" that they are his "immediate attendants, his domestics ;" (really, my Lord, I transcribe the precise words), that they are "empowered and authorized to transact for God ; and "that not only in some particular things," but in fact in all things relating to the wondrous subject of "reconciliation between God and man."

This concluding statement, I pray your Lordship to remark, is closely in accordance with one of the dogmas of the somewhat notorious "Beaven's Catechism :" a work which, I may observe, *ex passant*, though rejected

by a large section of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, as unsound in doctrine, was, it is well known, surreptitiously introduced some time since into the Church Society's Depository, by one of your Lordship's Clergy; and has also been largely used at the National Sunday School, and I believe at some other of our Sunday Schools in this city, especially in the instruction of candidates for the Confirmation recently held by your Lordship. In Beaven there are, (among many other curious, and some *unseemly*, things,) the following question and answer:—Q. What persons are authorized to reconcile penitent sinners to God?—Ans. The Ministers of the Church.—And, as a proof, we are referred to 2 Cor. v. 18, 19: “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given unto us the ministry of reconciliation: to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” Well, whatever may be the delinquencies of Dr. Beaven in other respects, (and those who are better acquainted with his writings than I am, tell me that their name is “Legion,”) he cannot at all events, in this instance, or in others that I could cite, if it were not foreign from my present subject, be justly taxed with “quoting Scripture for his purposes:” for, if there be one passage more than another unsuited to his purpose, if there be one passage that more clearly than another disproves his assertion, if there be one passage that utterly demolishes his arrogant assumption, it is this. Does not the Lord’s Apostle, speaking directly by inspiration, here declare that it is God who reconciles sinners to himself by Jesus Christ; and that He had committed, even to the Apostles of his Son, the *ministry* and the *word* of reconciliation alone? In other language, that the Ministers of God are to proclaim to sinners the word, the doctrine, the terms, of mercy and of reconciliation; to urge upon them earnestly the belief of that doctrine, the acceptance of those terms; and, as ambassadors for Christ, to pray them in Christ’s stead to be reconciled to God. But there is not so much as the shadow of a basis for the bold assumption, that men are reconciled to an offended God by the Ministers of the Church. If we needed, indeed, a com-

ment upon the words of the Apostle Paul, if we desired to know the meaning he himself attached to the expression, "the ministry of reconciliation," we should find it in his own language addressed to the elders of the Church at Ephesus; when, in prospect of bonds, and afflictions, and even of death, he spoke unto them in words well worthy of "Paul, the aged," well worthy of the Christian warrior, and right loyal servant of his Lord: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God!"

The fourth and last chapter refers to many and miscellaneous matters; and, in the first place, to "the duty of all Lay-Christians to their spiritual governors." I might possibly take exception to the last term—but let it pass. I concur sincerely in the writer's sentiment, (for it is scriptural,) that with regard to the ministers of the Church, the members of the Laity are bound "to honour and esteem them highly for their work's sake, to treat them with respect and reverence; to love them, to provide for their maintenance, to pray for them; and to obey them," at least in all things lawful.

But I am again compelled to join issue with the writer. "If the ministers of God," saith he, "do not act suitably to the dignity of their character, may we not condemn them?" No, no! quoth Nelson on the Fasts and Festivals. "Their character should certainly defend them from contempt." What! Their character defend them from contempt! Though that character, as assumed in the question, be unworthy of a Christian minister? Though that character be a stain and blot upon the holy profession which they disgrace? Was ever anything more illogically perverse, more absurdly monstrous, written!

To make allowance for human infirmities, to cast a veil of charity over many failings, to pity and compassionate those that, through mortal frailty and strong temptation, may have fallen, is unquestionable the duty of every christian man. But, that we are bound to hold in honour those that walk unworthily of their holy calling, simply because such is their calling; that we are forbidden to entertain

towards them even sentiments of contempt, when the dishonour they do to God and to his holy cause might, (if we were strictly to interpret the Psalmist's words, Ps. 139. 21,22.) warrant well even a far sterner feeling : this I have yet to learn, this I have yet to be persuaded to believe.

In further pursuance of his theme, "A pardon," says our author, "passed by an immoral lord-keeper, or a sentence pronounced by a wicked judge, are looked upon as valid to all intents and purposes, because their efficacy depends not upon the qualifications of those in commission, but upon the sovereign authority from whence they both receive their commission. So the advantages we derive by their administrations," (i. e. the administrations of unworthy ministers), "and the relation they have to God should still preserve respect for their persons." I acknowledge, my Lord, the validity of the pardon passed by the immoral lord-keeper : I acknowledge the validity of the sentence pronounced by the wicked judge. But I entertain no shadow of respect for the persons or the principles of either : on the contrary, I thoroughly despise, and from my heart contemn, both the lord-keeper and the judge. And similarly so, by a parity of reasoning, and by following out the line of argument indicated by the writer, if I do not conceive myself justified in absolutely despising, I do conceive myself more than justified in withholding all respect—emphatically, all respect—from him who, knowingly and advisedly, acts unworthily of the character he assumes ; I care not whether it be in things temporal, or in things eternal : even though his commission proclaim him an ordained Minister of the Church.

I pass over several pages bearing on the same topic, and come to the subject of Tithes. In connection with which we are edified by a quotation from Sir Edmund Coke (lib. I. C. 9, Sect. 73, fol. 58), and a sprinkling of old Norman French : to the effect that "the first Kings of the realm had all the lands of England in demesne, and *les grands manours* and *les royalties* they reserved ; and with the remnant they *enfeoffed* the barons." Abbot Ingulph, and Matthew of Westminster (A. 855) are then cited as witnesses to prove that "at this time Ethelwulf, the second monarch of the Saxon race after the

" Heptarchy, conferred the tithes of all the Kingdom upon " the Church." Here we are furnished with references to St. Irenæus (Adv. Hœr. I. IV. C. 34), Origen (Cont. Col. I. VIII. P. 440), and St. Cyprian (Unit. Eccl. n. 3, Can. 4, 36).—Nice light reading this, my Lord ; and profitable withal, for the illiterate poor !

The next subject discussed is Sacrilege. A sin of very early date indeed : for the most remarkable example adduced is the case of Adam ; who, it is stated, "as some think, ate of that tree as common, which God had reserved to himself as holy." This topic is dismissed with a grave reference to "Sir Henry Spelman's History and Fate of Sacrilege discovered by examples," &c. Sir Henry (for I have taken the trouble of looking into the subject) having purchased certain lands, which had in former times constituted a portion of the possessions of two of the suppressed monasteries ; and encountering obstacles to the quiet enjoyment of his purchase ; was seized, (protestant though he was), with violent scruples of conscience as to the lawfulness of a layman, or of any man, enjoying the broad lands of the ejected Monks : and wrote on the subject a work entitled, *De non temerandis Ecclesiis*. At a later period, A. D. 1620, or thereabouts, influenced by the same " compunctions visitings," he published the History and Fate of Sacrilege. It relates chiefly to the alienation of Church and Abbey lands : and we are directed to its antique pages for evidence, as to the " destruction this grievous crime brought upon several families of the nobility and gentry " of the English nation. This folio would have formed, unquestionably, in former years an invaluable addition to the libraries of the legislators of Canada ; and might have worked wonders in the prevention, or retardation, of the Secularization of the Clergy Reserves : but I must be permitted to question, hesitatingly, its general adaptation to the somewhat unlettered latitude of the Suburbs of Quebec.

To Sacrilege succeeds Simony. For the more effectual suppression of which, we are informed, that " it is determined by the laws of our Church that there should be no Ministers *sine titulo* among us :" and that " the party presented to any benefice shall make " oath that he hath made no *simoniacial* payment, con-

" tract, or promise, directly or indirectly, for obtaining
 " the preferment.—(Can. 40.) In the reign of Elizabeth, we are further told, it was enacted, " that he who
 " takes money for presenting, shall forfeit double the
 " value of one year's profit of the living; and that he
 " who ordains for money, shall, besides being otherwise
 " censurable, forfeit the sum of forty pounds."—(31 Eliz.
 c. vii.) Lastly, we are instructed, that it hath been
 shown by Bishop Stillingfleet, " that by the old Eccle-
 " siastical law (Eccles. Cases, p. 32) before the stat. 31
 " Eliz., a deprivation and disability was incurred by a
 " *simoniacus.*"

O, my Lord, what worthless husks are these, which we dare to proffer to the poor, the needy, and the hungry! Nay, worse than husks: for in such some nutriment may be found. But the famishing ask us for bread: and we give them a stone—for fish: and we offer to them a serpent.

One more notice, and for the present I have done. It may be that hereafter, (if the Lord will), I shall take the liberty of respectfully directing your Lordship's attention to certain further evidences of those Tractarian tendencies, which I have referred to in the earlier portion of this letter. At present I enter not more deeply into the subject, lest I should pass unreasonably the bounds of space allotted ordinarily to letter-writing.

After explaining the nature of Schism, and making reference to the subjects of Donatism, Novatianism, and Arianism, the writer demands, " What may we learn
 " from the consideration of those duties which we owe
 " to the Ministers of Jesus Christ?" Among the more prominent portions of the answer are the following; we learn " that one proper method to increase our reward in
 " the next world is, to do all good offices to those that
 " are dedicated to the service of the Altar;" and, " that
 " there is *no better way to edify the body of Christ,*
 " than by preserving a great deference for our spiritual
 " governors." No better way, doth this old writer tell us?—The Word of God, I trow, if studied in a prayerful, humble, and obediential spirit, would show unto us a better, " a more excellent way," than this!

I have now, my Lord, (to borrow a forensic phrase)
 gone through my case: and I beg to commend it humbly

to your grave consideration. I trust that I have demonstrated satisfactorily, that there did indeed exist grounds amply sufficient to vindicate the justice of the statements, to which I gave publicity, on the occasion to which already reference has been made. That such grounds have existed, and do exist, no man in your Lordship's Diocese regrets more deeply, or more sorrowfully, than I do. And if, in the preceding pages, I have sometimes written in a style lighter than some might deem the solemn nature of the theme required; it was only on the old Horatian principle, the adoption of which your Lordship's classic tastes will not condemn:

*"Ridiculum acri
Fortius et melius magnas plerumque secat res."*

I have, in reality, written in sadness. And with a reluctant hand have I exposed the gangrene, that has already commenced to eat its way into the vitals of the Church. Such exposure, however, was a stern and sad necessity. For unless the evil were unveiled, unless the unsightly sore were laid bare, its existence would be disbelieved; and none would lift the knife for its extirpation, until it had spread too widely, and too deeply, for removal.

My Lord, your Lordship has presided long over this Diocese. Your character is well known, and justly held in favourable esteem. You are looked up to, personally, with sentiments of regard and reverence by the majority: among whom I claim permission to include myself. By those possessed of better opportunities than I can pretend to, for forming an estimate on such subjects, you are said, (whatever may be the principles of some, presumed to rank high in your Lordship's confidence and favour), to have no sympathy with the views of the ultra-High-Church or Tractarian Party. I have therefore the more boldness in addressing my solemn appeal unto your Lordship. With regard, then, to the Tract of which this letter treats, and which is now by the hands of some of your Lordship's Clergy circulating in this city, I call upon you, with all the respect and reverence due to the high office which you hold, to examine well, and to declare distinctly, whether you look upon it as teaching doctrines consonant to the doctrines of the Church of England. I call upon you, as a Bishop

and Shepherd of the flock for which Christ died, to pronounce whether it is a work, which furnishes food sound, and suitable, and nourishing to the sheep and lambs of that flock, over which God has given you the oversight. I call upon you to say, whether you consider it calculated to prove instrumental in winning souls to Christ, in turning them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, and in making them wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. I call upon you to say, whether the themes dilated on in this publication of the "Society for promoting Christian Knowledge," constitute such subjects of contemplation as are meet and profitable for the aged and the dying sinner: for into the hands of such it has been given. And, anticipating fully from your Lordship a negative reply upon these several points; convinced, moreover, with respect to the statements and doctrines which I have here endeavoured—faithfully at least, however feebly—to expose; that it will be abundantly sufficient to submit them simply to your notice, in order to insure their condemnation at your Lordship's hands: I call upon you, in God's name, using the authority which He has given you, to put an end at once to the dissemination of this, and of such-like unprofitable, and unwholesome publications, in your Lordship's Parish, and Diocese at large.

Praying from the heart that, in the language of our liturgy, the great Head of the Church may grant unto your Lordship that you "may both perceive and know "what things you ought to do, and also may have grace "and power faithfully to fulfil the same."

I have the honor to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's Obdt.,

And Humble Servt.,

GILBERT PERCY, LL.D.

QUEBEC,

April, 24, 1858.

ed,
nes
ep
en
on
ng,
m
ist
es
no-
of
nd
en
a
d,
es
st,
ly
er
s:
ch
a-
e-
se

ur
to
w
ce